

ANNAMITE CIVILIZATION

give oneself a diploma. There was, however, a single school of medicine at Hue, directed by the royal doctors who had studied Chinese medical lore. More usually, professional knowledge was handed down from father to son by oral tradition. Unfortunately it is a point of honour in Annam that a doctor never ask any information from his patient. He may only feel his pulse but this process will probably take hours, for it gives the doctor time to make up his mind about the malady. Since he can have no idea of the real nature of the disease, the doctor is necessarily bound to be at least half charlatan. If he guesses right, the doctor is treated like a scholar: if wrong, he is completely discredited. Suggestion is his most effective remedy. Annamites have little confidence in their physicians. First a price is bargained for that will guarantee a cure, but the sum is paid only when the patient recovers. Annamites want quick results, and if the medicine prescribed is not immediately effective they change doctors. In this way the list of local and even ambulatory physicians is quickly exhausted. Their reaction is based on the firm belief that nature has supplied a remedy for every disease, and so a trial-and-error method is used until it is found. They believe that there are five organs in the human body which are interrelated, like a family, and which have affinity with the five elements and planets. Certain days and seasons, and even colours, are therefore propitious for treating their related diseases.

The Annamite doctor must needs be an apothecary as well, for his name means literally the master of remedies. Annamites specialize in herbs whereas the Chinese have more animal and mineral concoctions. Horses, for instance, are highly serviceable, in the moral as well as in

the physical sphere: their bones are good for bile, women's diseases, fever, and eye trouble; their powdered teeth cure fear; the mane and tail protect youth. Dogs and pigs are almost equally valuable, not to mention deer and serpents. When the Sino-Annamite pharmacy has been exhausted in vain to effect a cure, the sorcerer is called in, or the family carries to him a piece of the patient's clothing. After invoking favourable spirits, the sorcerer* consults his book for the right remedy and then tells on what day the cure will take place. If this does not work the sorcerer then goes to the patient's house and performs a sacrifice to induce the malignant spirit to leave the sick body. As with doctors, suggestion is often the most effective cure. It is principally under-nourishment and the amazing lack of hygiene that causes the majority of Annamite ills. Nervous diseases are almost Ritual and group life have removed any crushing sense of